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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: SERBIA APPLAUDS RUSSIAN CALL FOR NEW TALKS

11. (U) Summary: Prime Minister Kostunica and other Serbian leaders rushed to lend their strong support to Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov and Security Council Secretary Ivanov's statements over the weekend in favor of continued talks on Kosovo status under a new mediator. The statements, along with the similar comments by the Russian Ambassador in Belgrade, were the focus of all local media. By contrast, Lavrov's comment that Russia will not necessarily "block" a UNSC decision on Kosovo did not receive as much media attention and was ignored by Serbian politicians. End Summary.

RUSSIAN AMBASSADOR SPEAKS OUT, TOO

12. (U) Belgrade media reported Lavrov and Ivanov's support for more Kosovo negotiations as well as similar comments by the Russian Ambassador. Ambassador Alexeev told Belgrade daily Vecernje Novosti that "Russia was opposed to anyone, even the UNSC, deciding on that on which only Belgrade and Pristina can decide through negotiations." Alexeev added that Ahtisaari's "one-sided" plan "is against international law, Resolution 1244, and Belgrade's standpoint, which is clear and precise: any violation of territorial integrity and Serbian sovereignty is unacceptable...The U.N. will have to resolve the important preliminary issue: is the Security Council even authorized to consider something that is against the U.N. Charter? Russia believes that it is not." Alexeev explained that Russia wants to see "real" talks between Belgrade and Pristina, "without favoritism, without pressure, threats, and blackmail." (Monday Headlines: pro-government Politika's front page, "Ivanov: Find substitution for Ahtisaari;" Blic, "Russia reiterates its demand - Change Ahtisaari, keep negotiations;" Press, "Ahtisaari must fall.")

KOSTUNICA IMMEDIATELY SUPPORTS

13. (U) PM Kostunica immediately put out a statement of support saying, "The Serbian Government strongly supports Russia's initiative for the continuance of the negotiating process on determining the status of Kosovo along with a new UN intermediary." Kostunica added, "Serbia would constructively participate in the new negotiating process and take on its share of responsibility for finding a compromise and just solution." PM advisor and Kosovo negotiator Slobodan Samardzic reiterated that the Russian FM was a "voice of reason" after Ahtisaari "spent 14 months without...reaching a compromise."

13. (U) Outgoing Serbian FM Draskovic called Lavrov's position "logical" as there have not been any "essential negotiations in Vienna" and Ahtisaari's proposal is not a "compromise."

14. (U) While there was no immediate reaction from President Tadic's

office, his advisor Leon Kojen called Lavrov's proposal "extremely constructive." Kojen added that continued negotiations were the only way to avoid a further destabilization of the situation in the region over Kosovo.

15. (SBU) Comment: Kostunica reacted immediately, and selectively, to frame the Russians' comments. He did not, for instance, address Russia's first direct statement that it would not necessarily block a UNSCR on behalf of Serbia ("not being more Serbian than the Serbs") The PM has again rushed to present the Russian Kosovo policy he hopes for, rather than perhaps the full breadth of Ivanov and Lavrov's more nuanced statements.

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